

The Life and Work of
FRANZ XAVER MESSERSCHMIDT
(1736 - 1783)

Methods in the representations of Madness

by

Ronan McCrea



T763

NC 0020420 X



m0056299NC

**The Life and Work of
FRANZ XAVER MESSERSCHMIDT
(1736 - 1783)**

Methods in the representations of Madness

by

Ronan McCrea

Thesis for the Hadcom Requirement of B.A. in Fine Art
Sculpture
1991

National College of Art and Design

Tutor: John Hutchinson

CONTENTS

Page 1		- Illustrations as Introduction
Page 17	Chapter 1	- Biographical Background - Fredrich Nicolais Report on Folly
Page 24	Chapter 2	- Psycho-analysis and Art - Kris and the psychotic sculptor
Page 43	Chapter 3	- Public works ; Private madness - Explanations from the underside of the age of Reason - Classifications of the Other - Representations of Madness
Page 64	Conclusion	
Page 68	Bibliography	

LIST of ILLUSTRATIONS

All works of F.X. Messerschmidt, unless otherwise stated.
All dimensions in height only.

* Dimensions not available.

- Fig. 1.- Gentle, Peaceful Sleep. (44cm-zinc)
Fig. 2.- The Melancholic One. *
Fig. 3.- The Courageous Soldier. *
Fig. 4.- The Artist How he Imagined Himself Laughing. *
Fig. 5.- The Reliable One. *
Fig. 6.- The Incapable Bassonist. *
Fig. 7.- A Hypocrite and Slanderer. *
Fig. 8.- An Old Cheerful Smiler. *
Fig. 9.- A Seriously Wounded Man in Agony. (44cm-plastercast)
Fig. 10.- The Yawner. (44cm-lead)
Fig. 11.- The Vexed One. *
Fig. 13.- Just Rescued from Drowning. *
Fig. 14.- A Haggard Old Man with Aching Eyes. (44.5cm-alabaster)
Fig. 15.- The Obsinate One.*
Fig. 16.- A Simpleton. *
Fig. 17.- A Strong Odour. (48.9cm-lead)
Fig. 18.- A Difficult Secret. (42cm-lead)
Fig. 19.- A Surly Old Soldier. (45cm-marble)
Fig. 20.- A Powerful Man.
Fig. 20a- A Powerful Man; Profile. (42.5cm-lead)
Fig. 21.- Surly Old Soldier(2).
Fig. 21a- Surly Old Soldier(2); three quarter view.
Fig. 22.- The Buffoon. *
Fig. 23.- The Worried Man *
Fig. 24.- The Ill-Humoured One. *
Fig. 25.- The Satirizing One. *
Fig. 26.- The Sinister Man. *
Fig. 27.- The Constipation Sufferer. *
Fig. 28.- First Beak Head. (40cm-alabaster)
Fig. 28a- First Beak Head; Profile.
Fig. 29a- Second Beak Head. (40cm-alabaster)
Fig. 30.- Childish Weeper. (zinc/lead alloy)
Fig. 31.- The Enraged & Vengeful Gypsy. (plastercast)
Fig. 32.- Portrait of Jan Van Sweiten. *
Fig. 33.- Portrait of Capuchin Monk Fessler.*
Fig. 34.- 'Rakes Progress' by Hogarth (Etching)



Fig 1



Fig 1A.



Fig 2.



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5.



Fig 6



Fig 7



Fig 8.



Fig 9.

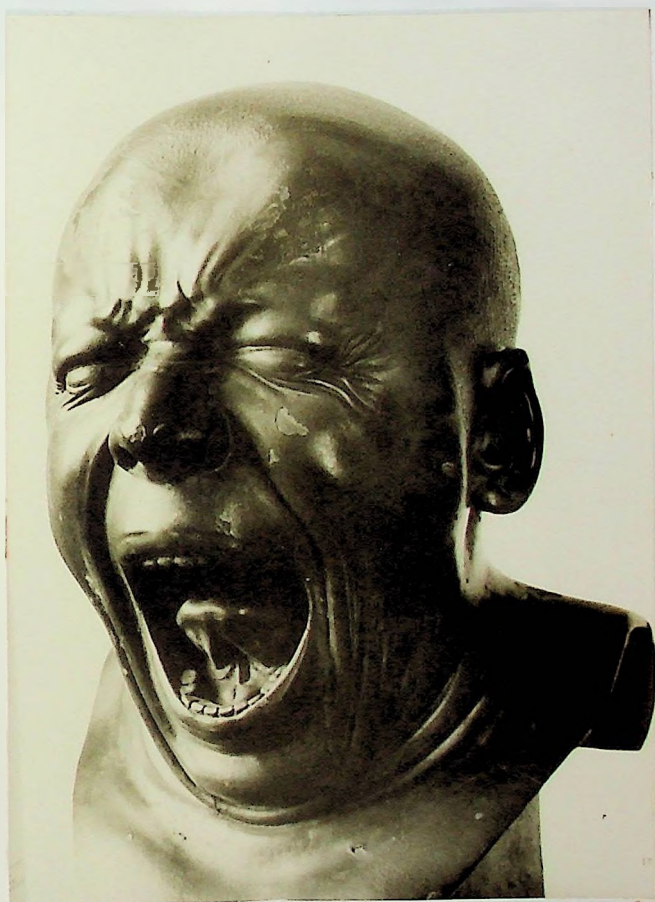


Fig 10.



Fig 11



Fig 12



Fig 13.



Fig 14.



Fig 15



Fig 16.

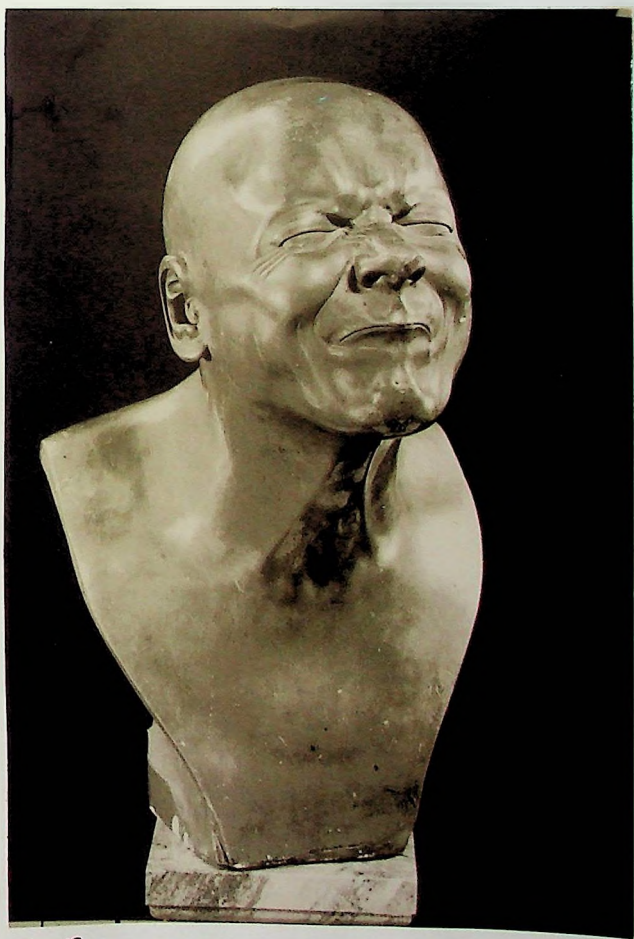


Fig 17.

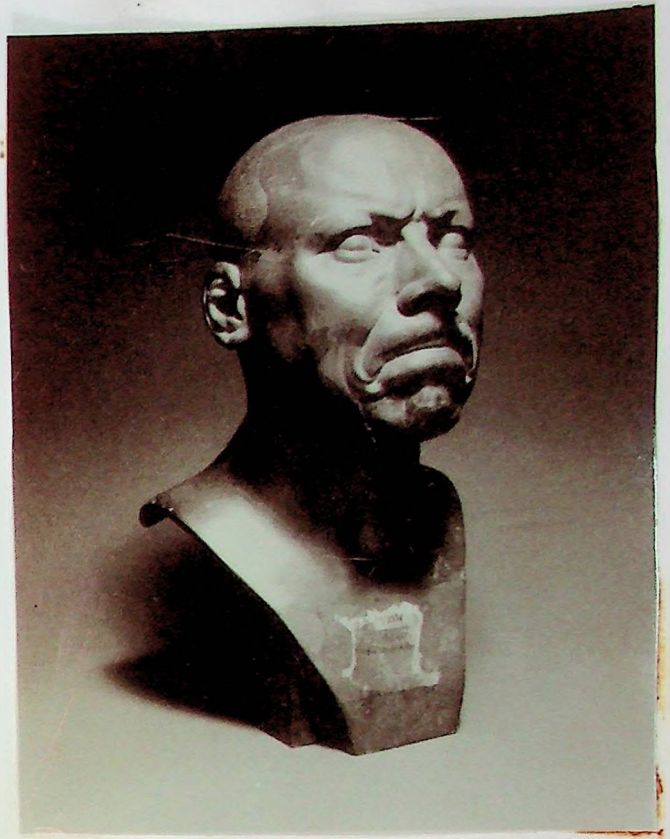


Fig 18



Fig 19.

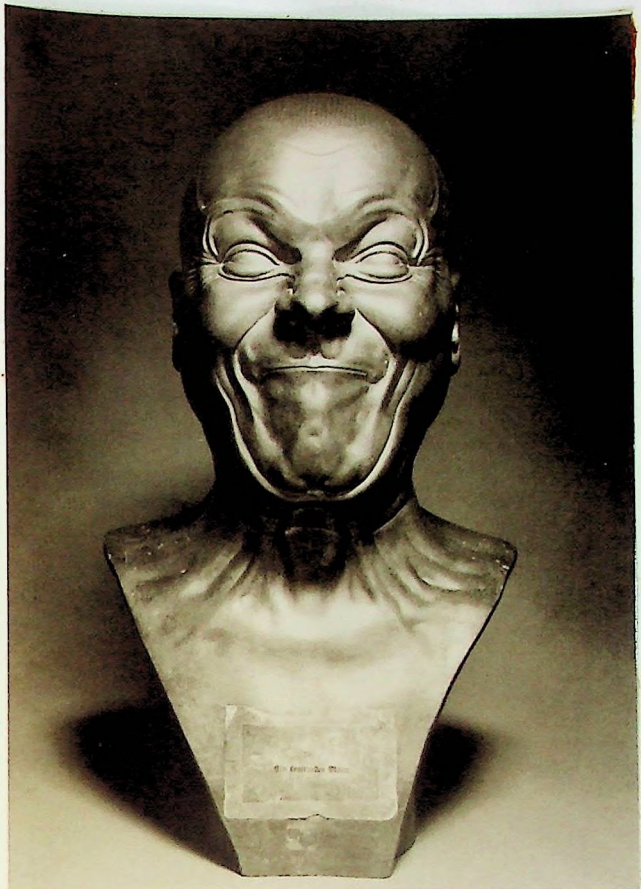


Fig 20

Fig 20A.



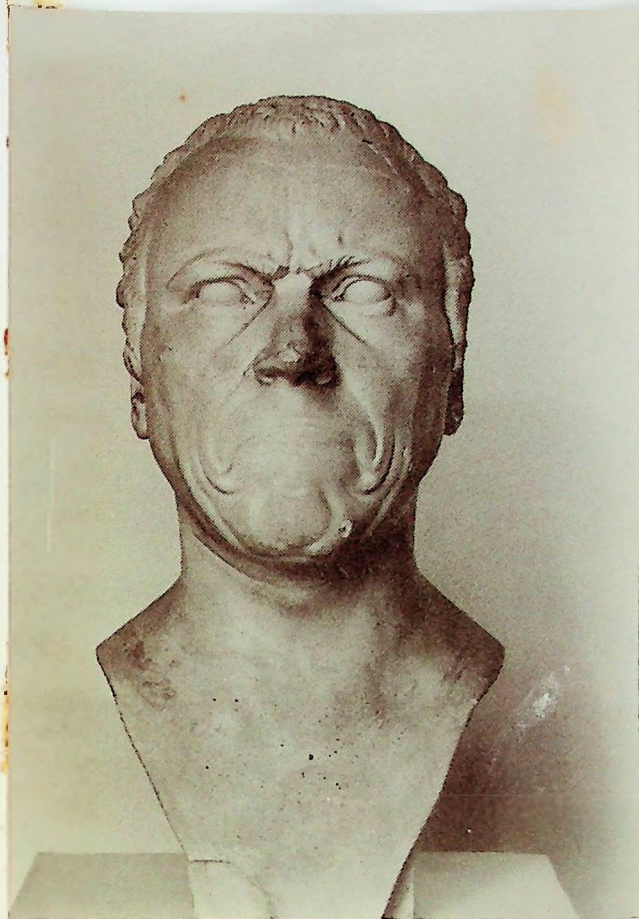


Fig 21.



Fig 21A

Fig 22.





Fig 23.



Fig 24



Fig 25.



Fig 27.



Fig 26.

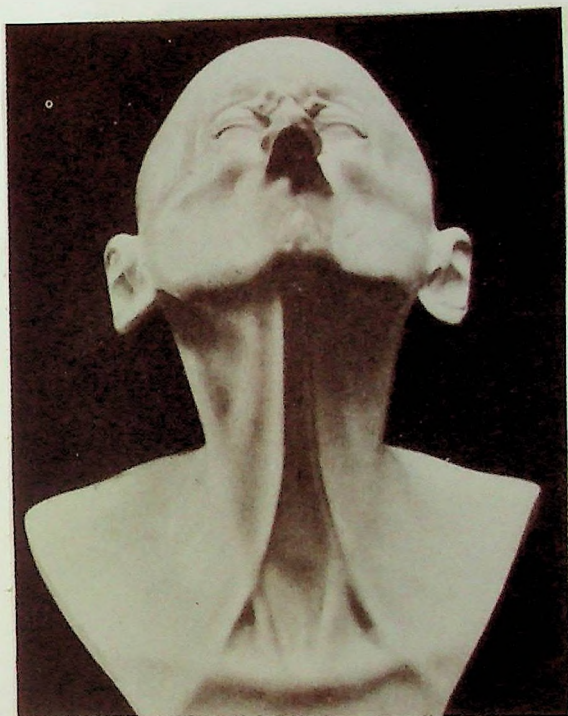


Fig 28.



Fig 28A .

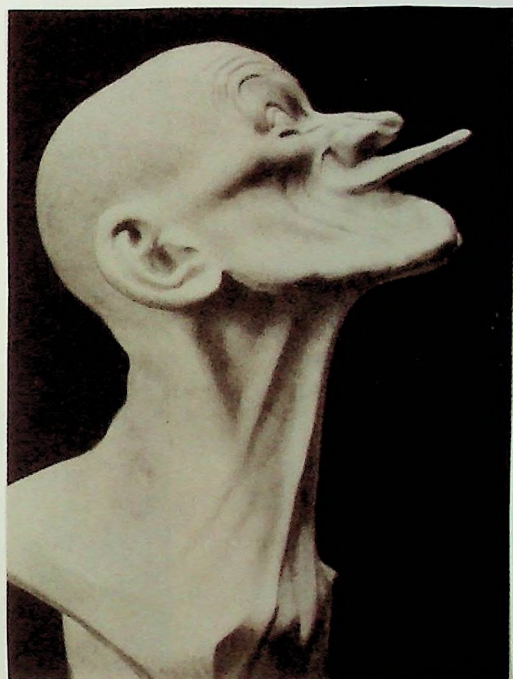




Fig 30



Fig 31.



FIG. 116.
F. X. Messerschmidt, (Jan van Swieten)

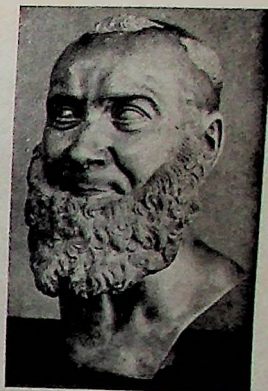


FIG. 117.
F. X. Messerschmidt, (The Capuchin Monk Feiler)

Fig 32

Fig 33



Fig 34

CHAPTER 1.

Franz Xaver Messerschmidt was born in 1736 in Weissensteig, Southern Germany, of a large artisan family. After serving his apprenticeship in Munich and in Graz, at sixteen he went to the Academy in Vienna to study. After two years there and on the recommendation of the director, he became a metal founder at the Imperial Armory in 1757. This was to give him access to the Imperial court and aristocracy for whom he worked from 1760. By 1769 his reputation as a sculptor was such that he was appointed assistant professor of sculpture at the Academy. The first reports of Messerschmidt falling ill are in 1770 and he may have been institutionalised in the Spital Zu St. Marx asylum for a short time¹

In 1774, when the senior professor at the Academy died, Messerschmidt, due to his position as next in line, could have been assured the job. However, it is over the issue of promotion that we see the first definite separation of Messerschmidt from his peers, due to his temperament. The directors of the Academy did not put forward Messerschmidt's name to the Empress Maria Theresa, whose approval led to such appointments. The reasons are best explained in a letter from Count Kaunitz, prime minister, conveying to the monarch the view of the Academy

"the most important objection as far as this man is concerned, is the fact that for the last three years he has shown signs of some confusion -

perhaps owing to his poverty or to natural disposition. Although that the confusion in his head has meanwhile subsided, permitting him to work as he had done before, it occasionally is still evident in a not perfectly healthy imagination...in that he believes all other directors and professors to be his enemies: he still has odd and peculiar whims and therefore can never be completely composed."

Messerschmidt, deeply offended by this, refused the pension the Empress offered him instead of the job and promptly left Vienna. He went to Munich and established some contact with the court there, but soon moved on. In 1777 he went to Pressburg where his brother lived, staying there for a time and finally he bought a house on the outskirts of the city. It was there he remained until he died in 1783, aged 47. The presence of a sculptor of the Imperial court living in Pressburg caused quite a stir, and indeed news of his living there brought some visitors from Vienna. The most notable for us is the report of Messerschmidt in 1781 when he was very isolated and poverty-stricken, by Friedrich Nicolai.

Before examining the writing of Nicolai, perhaps it is useful to see the reports of two other travellers who visited Messerschmidt but did not seem to get the opportunity to have the artist explain himself to the same extent as he did Nicolai. Johann Georg Mensel found him thus:

"... in his little room in a gruff manner he decided not to show anything to anybody. ... This honest man combined a great deal of pride with

some folly the result of which one can see in his appearance which is haggard."²

Briefe Friedal was luckier in that he got inside his studio in 1774 and writes:

"To have been in Pressburg and not to have seen the famous sculptor would disgrace the art-lover ... and having inspected the place where Messerschmidt studied his Egyptian heads he was amazed to find the man not only an artist of merit but also a seer of ghosts!"³

It was the theories and beliefs that Messerschmidt conveyed to Nicolai on his visit in 1781, on subjects such as spirits and demons and his processes for the execution of the "character-heads that, as well as making for the most unusual reading, are the basis for the biographical data, the psychoanalyst Kris would use in his work in 1932.

The material conditions which Nicolai found Messerschmidt were spartan.

"A few necessities and a prized book on the proportions of the human figure, in addition there hung on the wall a drawing of an Egyptian statue without arms which he never looked at without awe and admiration"

This as Nicolai notes is,

"reflected to the specific folly of Messerschmidts which he would pursue to astonishing heights"

It is interesting to see Nicolai's approach to the sculptor which perhaps reveals him as a man of his age : a personification of the 18th century age of enlightenment.

"The great majority seeing a man in Messerschmidt's circumstances hold him for either an extraordinary man or declare him to be a downright fool not meriting further attention ... " (Nicolai)

The intertwining of body and soul in conceptions of the human condition was a notion of the time, which as we shall see in Chapter three dealt with the body in order to remedy the soul (derived from ancient Hippocratic notions of the four humours):

"I believe that what pertains to the ills of the body is equally applicable to the ills of the spirit : viz. that an exact knowledge there of permits of ascertaining the true nature of the forces residing within man and of their actual effects to a very high degree. Thus when I see curious persons such as this I lend neither to outright wonder, nor to contempt, but rather to the best of my capability to examine in which such persons have arrived at their cherished notions" (Nicolai).

Nicolai did indeed then question Messerschmidt, concerning his cherished notions. Despite the reticence that Nicolai encountered and his belief that the concepts were, in the main, extremely nebulous, he did exact the following;

"that is was spirits that so affrighted and tormented him, especially at night he presupposed as an irrefutable axiom. He had not understood for a long time how it could be that he who had persisted in so modest a life, should have to bear so much torment of the spirits and according to the enthusiastic theory they should surely have maintained a most pleasant intercourse with him for that very reason ... he had pondered over the matter and discovered the entire and absolutely perfect system in which he and virtually anyone could be master over the spirits".

Messerschmidt devised a system which is best described by Jill Lloyd as a "type of paralogic which is a perfect polished inversion of Enlightenment reason". Nicolai explains;

"The good man arrived at a very true proposition that every thing in the world stands in a certain relation, and that all effects correspond to their course ... and that everything in the world was governed by proportions ... So it was that Messerschmidt looked to Egypt and being an artist, indulged in the dream that the proper secret of proportion really lay in the proportion of Egyptian statues, in particular as shown in the drawing which was hanging by the window. ... If Messerschmidt sensed a pain in his abdomen or thighs (as may befall anyone readily, especially if he lead a sedentary way of life) he would imagine it to be due to his working on some part of the face of a statue of marble or lead ... he fancied that the "spirit of proportion" envied him for approaching so near perfection in the knowledge of proportions, and that this motivated the spirit to cause him pain.

He determined to penetrate even further into the depths of proportions that he should at last gain power over the spirit and no longer the spirit over him ... he imagined that if he were to pinch himself in various parts, notably under the right side under the ribs ; and combine there with some facial contortion which related to the pinching of his side, in the Egyptian proportion that always was required, then the summit of perfection in this matter would be obtained ... Now he hesitated not to put the theory into effect ; he pinched himself, pulled faces in

front of a glass and deemed himself witness to the most amazing effect of his dominion over spirits. He rejoiced in his system and resolved to fix it by the illustration of these grimacing proportions and pass it on to posterity. In his opinion the different variations of the grimaces numbered 64"⁴

By the time Nicolai had visited Messerschmidt, sixty different heads had completed including what are known as the two "beak-heads" (Fig.). Enquiring as to the reason or occasion as he put it, for the busts displayed the extension of pursed lips into a near bill or beak, Messerschmidt granted him "an insight into the method in his madness". Nicolai noted:

"Messerschmidt would regard these images only cursorily with a frenzied glance and then turn away. I inquired with the greatest of caution, as to what they might be intended to represent, he seemed quite reluctant to submit his explanation ; his otherwise vital eyes turned quite glazed, while the answer came in disjointed words. Messerschmidt said "it (namely the spirit) had pinched him and he had pinched it back until the figures had come forth"

Nicolai collected from this that those caricatures of human visages were really representations of the spirit of proportion with whom he battled to the near death. I shall again leave the words to Nicolai:

"But awesome enough it is, that a sculptor, beginning with the purest Antique proportions of the human figure, then misled by a blighted imagination and by insane hypotheses, should conceive at last, of the Spirit of Proportion itself in an embodiment of the most abhorrent disproportion imaginable by man".

- 1 This suggestion comes from Pötzl Malivoka. All references to the above author come from Jill Llyods catalogue essay for the 1988 exhibition of Messerschmidt's work in the I.C.A. London
- 2 J.G. Mensels report quoted from WittKower : "Born under Saturn"
- 3 Brief Friedal report : ibid
- 4 49 sculptures survived after Messerschmidts death, wax and plaster cast of some of the character heads were also taken posthumously.

CHAPTER 2

I

Ernst Kris locates the start of Messerschmidt's illness in 1770 with the beginning of his work on the character heads.

Kris believes that for the next 13 years, until Messerschmidt's death, we see the advancement of a psychosis, with predominating paranoid trends which fits the general clinical picture of schizophrenia. For psychoanalysis there emerges an incompatibility between the artistic productions of an advanced psychotic and that of a "mentally balanced artist". While this line is not hard and fast, and Kris's argument would support the difficulty with drawing such a line, there are assertions that are made by Kris which have important implications.

a) Firstly, the difference between art produced by the psychotic and non-psychotic artist are intrinsically different. This is because of the perceived (by, in this case Kris) intentions of the artist in making the art; i.e. the meaning and function of the art object for the artist concerned and meaning or meaninglessness of it to the audience. This thesis however, is based in no uncertain terms on the perceptions of the psychoanalyst and his attitudes towards art, aesthetics and its function.

b) The relationship between psychoanalysis and art, has from Freud been traditionally a difficult one and since so much of this paper is based on the writing of Dr. Kris, it will require our attention. The drawing together of the

two fields in itself is something which may lead to the perception of the continuence of the mythology of "mad artist" archetype. Indeed, the "psychopathology" which Freud made of Leonardo may be viewed as bolstering myths that reach back to Plato - a madness that is intense and intractable in the artist, inspiring him or her to art, yet making for a damaging life.

While it can be argued that Plato's fire of divine frenzy or divine inspiration is a madness which is very different from the conceptions of mental illness that Kris considers in Messerschmidt, one must note as did the psychologist Schnider that

"the problem of a purely psychological approach (to art) fails to acknowledge : the notion of the "mad artist" is a historical and literary reality, (the notion, not the artist) and by brushing it aside as mistaken, one denies the existence of a generic and deeply significant symbol⁵"

This symbol, its meanings and implications are carried in the myths of art and are present at some level in the mind of the psychoanalyst. Also perhaps important, is the implications of the traditional nature of psychoanalysis in relation to art : That it reflects more about the nature of the psychoanalyst, his or her attitudes to art and aesthetics than perhaps about the nature of art itself. The view that art is the "mere" symbolic act of an artist's ego or psyche - a symptom - often negating the creative integrity of the artistic process and its art objects.

II

Kris approach to art

If nothing else, Kris was confident in his craft. His study "rests on the assumption that the complete system of psychoanalysis offers at present the best chance for the understanding and predicting human behaviour". The centering of the position of artist in the tradition of "artist touched by madness", is one that underpins Kris' analysis. One can see this in his tracing of the development of Aesthetic Illusion as a principle of artistic production and consumption. One can see in the example he gives of dramatic art, how he traces the role of aesthetic illusion. In early Greek civilisation, there was no rigorous separation between audience and stage. All were potential actors, participating in a festival or ritual, celebrating or reliving what myth had taught them as the essence of tradition. What later developed into more or less independent branches of art was part of one performance - music, dance, verbal expression were fused. Kris notes that no other response but active co-operation and coaction was possible. He postulates that the difference in ability which enables some to play major parts, was probably viewed by the community as not only a matter of skill and hence social status, but as a reflection of a special relationship with the divine. So there are two elements here. Firstly, the difference between what we now classify as art is separated from ritual or participatory actions by way of aesthetic illusion, and secondly, those who are cast in the

role of artist are privy to some insight, divine or otherwise which the audience then passively observes through the artwork. Where for instance "primitive" reaction to a work of art is in ignoring aesthetic illusion. This is aptly shown by the story of a farmer who lives in isolation, comes to town and witnesses an inspiring play. The hero in the play is facing a conspiracy by his alleged friends against his life and the farmer on the side of the hero cannot bear to see the imminent victory of the conspirators. He decides to interfere, gets up from his seat and shouts through the hall, "look out they are armed". So the experience of art is mistaken as it has not lead to experiences in the mind, but to action. Therefore Kris stance is, that the artist as we know him, is in a limited but powerful position. Kris tells us,

"the artist assumes a position of leadership. His message, the work of art, is not rooted in a call to common action, which is the nature of propaganda - nor the call to a common spiritual experience which is the function of the priest; nor does the artist teach his public in order to widen its insight. All this he may do. At any given time all or some of the arts may be more or less closely linked to the call to action or be part of religious secular teaching. While some such links exist of necessity at all times, the specific meaning in which the work "art" is used in our civilisation refers to another function : "the message is an invitation to a common experience in the mind, to an experience of a specific nature"

Here are postulations that give the foundation for allowing Psycho-analysis the mandate to discover and explain art. If it is an experience of the mind, then the artists intention can, by his own premise, be explained by the

science of interpretation of the mind - psychoanalysis. Donald Kuspit notes that the relationship between psychoanalysts and their subject of artists has many levels, some of them being historical. In the early days of psychoanalysis the new science was deeply suspect intellectually and unacceptable socially, while art, even often controversial, was an ingrained time honoured part of culture. Psychoanalysts saw artists as more socially acceptable than themselves, yet also recognised artists as outsiders like themselves⁶. Psychoanalysts also defined themselves as a kind of artist, masters of the "art of interpretation as Freud called it"⁷. This identification links in with the myth of the misunderstood artist among his contemporaries. Kuspit writes that the identification (although social conditions of both psychoanalysis and art has changed) persists in an "involvement of admiration, empathy and envy ... at the same time such "artist envy" is balanced by most ordinary psychoanalysts unconscious feeling of superiority to the greatest of artists. "For psychoanalysts see themselves as using the art of interpretation to apply a scientific understanding of the psyche"⁸. So, the psychoanalyst for Kuspit, sees him or herself as both scientist and artist figure. The resistance that many feel as to the application of psychoanalysis to art, stems from the perception that as a science it sees art as a symptom, then surely the cure would be the elimination of art. This correlation of art and madness not only bolsters the mythology of the genius-madness-artist triangle (which many may find unhelpfully reactionary) but inherent

is the suggestion that art does not overcome problems of emotional, mental experience but merely reflects madness. Therefore, it is the implied suggestion of the psychoanalysis (following in the footsteps of the mythology) that the artist has a more intimate awareness of the experience of madness than any other human "type", apart from the downright psychotic. The scientific element of the psychoanalyst suggests that art is not so much a way of gaining new knowledge, as of expressing what is already known in socially novel ways.. It is science that they believe to be the true field of discover. The "artist envy", therefore, is overlaid with the scientists contempt for the artist "going back to Platos banishment of poets from the Republic and his degradation of art as inferior knowledge - an illusion of knowledge hardly worth the name"⁹.

Freud admired the playwright and novelist Arthur Schnitzler, who seemed to Freud to gain intuitive truths about the psyche that he himself had only discovered through labourous scientific work with patients. Kris also recognises the intuitive flash of inspiration as the artists revelation and the nature of art from this premise is in itself questionable. Indeed, one need only look at the reason why certain artists hold more attraction for psychoanalysis than others. In visual art the expressive agnst-driven work attracts the analyst more than what Kuspit calls the "Duchampian art about art tradition".

The main consideration of the work of Messerschmidt comes from a source while having being written in the 1930s, predates the development of feminist critique of Freudian psychoanalysis on many levels. Including the criticism of the whole basis of the male heroic, genius/artist mythology. The reactionary position of the myths of inspiration and intuitive insight has of course been questioned and probed for its counter meanings and implications for the contemporary context.

Yet, it is to Kris we turn and it is he who sets the agenda for any serious discourse on Messerschmidt.

III

Kris and the psychotic sculptor

It is not the purpose of this essay to trace the development of psychoanalysis in relation to new social theoretical and political changes and influences since the time of Kris, much as it is not to trace the development of Austrian sculpture since the 18th century. It is to preface the consideration which Kris gives to Messerschmidt with a context, a context which I feel must be considered as Kris gives us the most extensive writing in English about the sculptor and issues surrounding his work.

The notion of Aesthetic Illusion is one that Kris considers central to the idea of a function and nature of art. The loss or ignorance of aesthetic illusion is what the productions of the insane and the "preliterate ritual" culture have in common. However, having established that the artist has an ancestor or kindred spirit in the priest/shaman, Kris also offers some other notions which account in the psychoanalysis for a boundary between sane and insane art and the production of art from the context of the unconscious.

Wittkower wrote that psychoanalysis with regard to art did not drastically change much of what thought had gone before in relation to the mythologies of artists and art, only that terminology had changed. While the influence of Psycho-analysis is huge, there is a grain of truth in what Wittkower contests. The platonic idea of creative madness finds its echoes in ego psychoanalysis in the notions of sublimation and neutralisation. The suggestion of a "touched" archetypal artist finds its cousin in the ego psychology of the artist. Sublimation is listed as a defence mechanism of the ego and refers to the displacement of energy discharge from a socially unacceptable to an acceptable one, and to a transformation of the energy discharged. The transformation itself is termed "neutralisation". The more acceptable i.e. "higher" activity can be executed with energy that has retained or regained its original instinctive quality. The suggestion that art then (the "higher" activity) is a symptom of ego is

difficult to brush aside from a context of the historical mythology of the artist type.

The nature of Messerschmidt's sculpture, the representation of human heads and the rendering of features and modelling style, bring us to the starting point for two issues. a) For art-historical purposes the position of Messerschmidt in relation to the dominant styles of the time and the question of the queso science of physiognomy, which cross pollinate in art, and secondly, the starting point from a psycho-analytical point of view in the diagnosis of Kris.

It is useful to first approach the character busts in the context of Kris reading in terms of symbolic meanings and keys to the interpretation of Messerschmidt's mental state. Kris explains why the character heads prime meaning are less concerned with the illustration of a scientific theory of physiognomy or with an extended study of "expressions". Kris blocks together the obvious self portraits (Fig 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and notes on the lack of difference between them in terms of expression. The striking rigidity and emptiness of their expression is only distracted by the different type of head dress

"the occasional attempts at slight variations of the mimic expression cannot dispel the impression of uniformity"

The various types into which Messerschmidt transform his human features show that there are patterns of what he terms "mimic constellation", which are repeatedly varied. In the Fig 24 and Fig 25 the distortion of the facial musculature involves as similar tightly shut mouth in both cases and the former with eyes tightly shut and knitted brow and the latter with eyes wide open and wrinkled brow. This repeating of mimic constellation in a fractional way, completely (an example of the latter by comparing Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14) gives rise to two interlocking tendencies. Firstly, the tendency to strive for some immediately intelligible personality trait by means of characterisation of expression. And secondly, for Kris the other tendency to push the expression and change it in the direction of a grimace.

The notion of grimace in context of the psychoanalytic process occurs under two conditions : firstly, "a miscarried expressive movement, that is when a repressed tendency interferes with the sequence of the intended expression". An example of this being smiling upon expressing condolence. Secondly, it occurs as an intended communication "making a grimace" or "striking a pose". Psychoanalytically speaking, in the first instance the expression of aggressive drives triumph over the ego and in the second the aggressive drives are used intentionally by the ego. In other cases there is the total loss of control temporarily by the ego over facial expression, in for example being overwhelmed by physical pain or a sudden breakthrough of passion. Kris regards

these with the term of speaking of a "distorted face", related but distinct to the very first manner of grimace due to the lack of influence on the facial musculature by the ego.

The detail paid to such categorisation is necessary due to the function which Kris conceives from the steady loss of genuine expression and tendency towards "grimace" in Messerschmidt's character heads. The miscarried facial expression as described is similar to the pathologically distorted facial expression in that Kris recognises the essential characteristic of all expressive movements, namely their "autoplastic" function. The Autoplasty process refers to the function in the internal psychic system. The generally comprehensible, easily interpretable expression is distinguished from that which "does not speak to us" (Kris). Due to this autoplastic function (similar to other autoplastic formations such as hysteria) the understanding of the mimic constellations of Messerschmidt are internal by nature. Kris confidently writes, "We must conceive of the mimic constellations of Messerschmidt's busts as manifestations of unconscious process and try and elucidate their meaning by psycho-analytical interpretations". This is to be done with the clinical data of the sculpture, Messerschmidt's own assertions and Nicolai's observations.

By way of analysis, Kris as I have stated, starts with the diagnosis of psychosis as mentioned at the start of the chapter, indicated by the delusions of the artist with its

characteristic paranoid trends. Remembering the second part of Nicolai's report, with regard to the grimaces made by Messerschmidt in front of the mirror, the grimace which he made permanent in the sculptures, Kris suggests that the meaning of the grimace is that it is an apotroptic act. That is an act of warding off or intimidating the demons that Messerschmidt believed he was plagued by. Here is the crux of Kris' argument. Here there is a "clinical regression into magical behaviour". Apotroptic act is defensive magic. Aesthetic illusion is gone because of the intention of the maker of the image is the attempted change in the artists reality or environment by the ritual magic of the grimace. We shall return to the implication of this in relation to the role of the functions of art and psychoanalysis, but what of the interpretations of the symbolic meaning Kris gleans from this magical process?

The report of Nicolai states that Messerschmidt had always lived in chastity and therefore expected to be on friendly terms with the persecuting demons and that, "man like the animals must hide the red of his lips", is interpreted by Kris as a denial of sexuality in which the lips serve the symbolic function of sexual impulses. Considering the demons then in the double role of punisher and seducer in their persecution, Kris considers the eyes too in which they are either wide open or lightly pressed together, conceiving this as an attempt to brave or deny the sight of demons. A number of busts (fig 15) with lips flaccid and (fig. 30) with lips half open in disgust, are

interpreted as representing a yielding or surrender to the demons.

By way of preface to the analysis of the beak heads Kris suggests that the series taken as such, except the beak heads, supports the diagnosis of pathology. The attempt at interpreting "separate aspects of mimic constellation" is less important than the "persuasive impression of uniformity", that is gained from a longer look at the series.

"The more one is familiar with them the less interest the observer has in any individual bust"
"His endeavours to interpret the expression are soon abandoned; the mimic constellation is soon recognised as grimace. The activity of the artist has been severely limited by special conditions - that spontaneity has given way to stereotyping is evidence as pathological"¹⁰

The actual beak heads which stand out from the others and are the most intriguing of Messerschmidt's work (Fig 28, 29). Nicolai postulates that they are indeed the representations of the Spirit of Proportion that haunts the sculptor and Kris finds that his evidence concurs with this idea. In terms of analysis of the character busts, Kris follows Nicolai's description and follows that the lips are not only pressed together as they are on other busts but that the protruding and pointed shape give them a phallic impression. Although this for Kris is somewhat convincing an alternate reading, as opposed to the "active phallic" theory i.e. "of a breakthrough of passive feminine fantasy",

which the tightly closed lips of the other busts seem to have warded off. Kris then gains the conviction, "that they are the direct illustration and fellatio", to which the demons invite Messerschmidt and which they force upon him.

"A glance at the rectangle of the neck in the frontal view (Fig 28) confirms the impression that the features of the human head have been distorted or stretched in order to combine or include both male and female sexual organs".

This interpretation, be what is may, however there is another important problem which has more bearing on the nature of art than the importance of fellatio in the beak heads. For Kris the foundation of these busts is completely different from the others in terms of the function. In the beak heads Kris speaks of a "transition from the autoplasic function of a mimic ritual and magic to the alloplastic function of a work of art"

The aesthetic premise has shifted for Kris by warrant of the lack of grimace. There is "no loss" of human features, and they are not merely more intense but different in kind. The alloplastic function is one where the process is now on the outside environment. The psyche has turned from itself forwards outside transformation. Kris sites the "creation of an ornamental configuration", that seems to correspond to a particular psychological position. They are a communication of the mental state Messerschmidt felt, evidenced by the anxiety they caused the artist. Nicolai

quotes him of saying that he was fully capable of doing the entire series of busts over again "with the exception of the two beak heads which he felt unable to produce a second time". So, the distinction is drawn between the majority of the character busts which have no communicative function for the artist. There is no artistic (as Kris understands "artistic") intent. They are devices of magic, the apotropaic act, instruments in a ritual. The representation, therefore, of the demon is considered art as it has in its intention the representation or realisation of an image of the demon for no other reasons but to create the image. It does not have a function vis-a-vis any particular defensive ritual magic.

Kris sees in the character heads, with a "band" covering the mouth, (Fig 26, 27) elements also of an "ornamental configuration". However, because of their function, this cannot be regarded similarly to the beak head. Kris symbolically interprets this band as a girdle - the girdle of chastity in line with the meaning from the other mouth configurations as mentioned previously. Kris however, does make the interesting point that the uneven rendering of different aspects of the represented visage is due to the artist's tendency to "abandon the naturalistic rendering of those parts of the face whose magical meaning predominates". For instance, the girdle configuration gives a peculiar stylisation to the whole lower part of the face.

So, in general conclusion of Kris' reading of the work of Messerschmidt based on the "known psychology of schizophrenics", certain trends emerge. There is a second level of activity on top of the magical function of the character heads, which Kris concludes is due to a denial, cancelling or rationalisation of the magical meaning. Firstly, the evidence suggests that no models were used in the rendering of the sculptures save his own image in the mirror. The strange attempt then to present himself in many different guises - such as with a bald head, an old man with curls, a youth with slicked back hair, have a significance. For Kris they evidence the artist's attempt to prove the existence of his own person again and again and simultaneously as a quest of some sort for new and satisfactory external trappings.

Thus, for the sculptor, this seems like a quest that is bound to fail as the break-up of his reality comes to bear. For what is produced at the more advanced stages of psychosis tends to lose its meaning for the public. The endless stereotypical variations of a theme gain for the psychotic artist a new meaning unintelligible to others. But what Messerschmidt has done is overlay a secondary meaning on top of what is only meaningful for himself or part of his delusional thinking. This secondary level is the attachment of smiling expressions or comical effects over the grimace. Kris also noted that for the psychoanalyst it is not inconsequential that precisely such attitudes of smiling can be readily put to the service of

disguises of, and defense against anxiety. This then is what would differentiate between the psychotic production of an untrained artist and a trained one. Also revealing the coherence of the psyche to overlay the essence of the sculptures which although significant of symbolic gestures serve to disguise the original intention. The first period of his disorder, the death and dull "self-portraits", give an indication of the nature of the work. For Kris the turn to the physiognomic subject represents in the psychotic the notion of a person who struggles before the mirror for a genuine facial expression, in order to retain rapidly vanishing contact with the environment. In this attempt, he fails. This can be regarded as a process in the attempts at restitution. The readily comprehensible facial expression is replaced by a system of rigid mimic constellations, which become the bearers of a ritual magic. They have failed or are unsuitable in serving a "social function and establishing contact with the environment" (Kris).

The nature of the delusion follows a thread that the accounts of Kris and Nicolai build on, in terms of the mythology of "the image of the artist".

As we have seen earlier, the respective positions of art, psychoanalysis and myth complicate matters. The schizophrenic has not only parted with the reality being shared by those not labelled insane but replaces the "lost reality" with his or her own.

Indeed, the delusions of Messerschmidt do closely relate to symbolic myths of artistic tradition. Kris concludes that these somehow are resident in the unconscious of many artists, i.e. the tradition where the artist as creator is endowed with the powers of a magician and is penalised by God for rebellion of rivalry. Remembering Messerschmidt's words to Nicolai that he had discovered the secrets of proportion for which the spirit of proportion was jealous, relates closely to the identification with the Promethean myth. Proportion-divina proporzione - is the secret of God and in achieving its secrets violates the divine prohibition. Messerschmidt here seems to identify with God - the sculptor creator.

Kris further develops this by relating the actions of Messerschmidt feeling his own ribs while working, to the myth of creation, where the human figure is created by God from a rib of Adam.

- 5 Schnider 1954, quoted from Wittkower
- 6 Psychoanalysis marginal position in its early days is compounded by the Jewish identification of many of its founders and advocates by an often anti-semitic medical establishment and society at large
- 7 Freud quoted here from Kuspits essay, **Artist Envy**
- 8 Kuspit : **Artist Envy**
- 9 ibid
- 10 Stereotyping is typical in creative productions of schizophrenia : endless repetition of images.

CHAPTER 3

Dr Kris has set the agenda for any serious consideration of the work of Messerschmidt since 1932. Since then the lines of argument have been drawn for us. However, from a textual point of view the most considerable counter-attack was from Margaret & Rudolf Wittkower, in an essay published in *Born under Saturn* in 1963. They re-examine Messerschmidt after the analysis of Kris and point out aspects of his work and the society in which he lived, that pointed to his sanity instead of to paranoid schizophrenia. This argument follows three basic tenets: Firstly the comparison of apparently 'normal' portrait commissions executed alongside his private work on character-heads. Secondly, the artistic tradition of physiognomy, which by Messerschmidt's time had developed into an established science as one might expect of the Age of Reason, And thirdly the vulnerable underside of the Age of Reason: "the revival of magical beliefs and rites and a foundation of a great number of secret societies"¹¹, was proposed as a factor to explain the normality of a belief in the spirit of proportion. I will consider the first and last issue that Wittkower raises and reserve physiognomy until the final chapter.

(1) Public Works, Private Madness

Messerschmidt's work, (although Kris maintains the character heads fall from the categorisation of art per sé), has not ignored the wider artistic concerns of the day. The transition that Messerschmidt made from a florid baroque portrait representation as witnessed in his bust of Jan van Swieten into a more sombre classical rendering of the character-heads. It is acknowledged that in the transition in sculpture and painting from baroque and Rococo into the more classicist idiom, Messerschmidt was one of the first Germanic sculptors to do so. The rendering of the bust has the impression of a Roman bust of antiquity. The portrait of the Capuchin Monk, Fessler (Fig 33) is evidence for Wittkower of the difficulty in drawing the line between 'sane' and psychotic production. The very fact that commissions were executed would give credibility to the suggestion that the ability to complete work with no involvement in the 'delusional' system of the artist means that the 'sanity' of the artist is intact. Kris admits that it is possible to,

"distinguish those elements in the treatment of his medium which are determined by his individual psychological predispositions (in this case by his delusions) from others which as generally intelligible without recourse to such an individual frame of reference".¹²

But all throughout the career of Messerschmidt the 'psychotic' never appears to have actually harmed the technical skill of rendering the visage. The eye for realism was never diminished and it could be argued that the skill was more finely honed in the neo-classical latter phase, despite, or at least co-habiting with any psychosis. Pötzl-Malikora writing in 1982, generally agrees with Kris' representation of the character heads as psychotic but rather than try and come down with or against Wittkower extends beyond their assertions of normality or madness. She points to the ambivalent zone that the 'character-heads' seem to occupy. On the one hand they are fascinating because they display characteristics of the art of the insane while at the same time they correspond to contemporary artistic developments in Austrian sculpture. Their 'pathological intensity in no way compromises their skill, their calculated execution and stylistic self-consciousness. While presumably the stereotype of the images are to be attributed to the delusional process Kris sees the failure of a true expressive force in the character-heads and the grimaces in terms of the development of a delusional system of defensive sorcery, whereas Wittkower sees it as an indication of limited talent. Indeed predecessors of Kris who did not consider the key to understanding Messerschmidt's work and personality, and took no account of his insanity and the interpretation of this insanity, often considered the work limited. In 1929 A. Feulner viewed the character heads as "products of a pedantically naturalistic artist - a sarcastic and scornful

eccentric who mocked the weakness of his fellow creatures". He also co-related talent and madness, although differently from Pötzl-Malikova. Feuliner would have been inclined to regard the character studies as the productions of schizophrenic fantasy "had this kind of self-portrayal and self-irony not been consciously subjected to artistic discipline." So he could not have been insane because of the maintenance of coherent artistic procedure and discipline?.

Let us return to the portrait of Fessler. As far as the psycho-analytical point of view is concerned there is little to indicate that it has any magical function in the delusional process of Messerschmidt. But the sober classicism with the stylization of the beard is evidence of a stylistic progression from his previous commissions. But considering the lips in the portrait of the monk, they are relations of the lip features on other character-heads. The lips are tightly closed although there is no impression of grimace in the overall facial representation. This detail may be significant. Kris suggests that it was not a natural characteristic of the model, noting that a similar tight-lipped detail is found on one other portrait bust Messerschmidt made at that time.¹³ In the character heads the lips are the carriers of secret magic thought and in these busts the lips contribute to the impression of grimace, although in Fessler's portrait the lips are integrated into the general facial features naturalistically. Kris supposes that there is a small

influence of his psychotic production in the portrait, and that as in 'normal' artistic practices the art works private meanings are integrated into the structure of the artistic product, with that product maintaining socially and culturally and meaningful existence. Kris writes,

"The capacity of the artist for using derivatives of unconscious processes in a socially and historically adequate way may well constitute a significant factor in his endowment".

However, turning to the sitter himself, the monk Fessler, it reveals that he was a "strange and restless man" who concluded his ecclesiastical career as bishop of the reformed community of St Petersburg, (Leningrad) in Russia. Also it is quite possible that the monks portrait may relate to particular historical scandal, documented in the 1780s when it was revealed that Capuchin monks had been locking up members who had lost their reason. They were thrown into subterranean cells after attempts to drive out the devil proved unsuccessful.¹⁴ This detail of the mad Capuchins incarcerated after failed exorcisms may have been a field of inquiry for Messerschmidt through the portrait of Fessler, with the sculptor having much empathy with the possessed monks. They too had lead a life of poverty and chastity (presumably) and had occasion to be confident that due to a pious disposition should be on favourable terms with things supernatural.

Similarly Jill Lloyd in her catalogue essay of the 1988 exhibitions of Messerschmidt's work in London, suggests the possibility that the character heads are evidence of a "mega-discourse about madness rather than being conditioned by insanity". Although Lloyd admits this possibility has not been seriously examined. Pötzl-Malikova suggests that if Messerschmidt had indeed been committed to the Spital Zu Marx asylum, he would have had the opportunity to view and even 'study' the forces of inmates in their various states of insanity.

The Age of Reason had, according to Wittkower, a vulnerable underside: the revival of magical beliefs and rites and the foundation of a great number of secret societies. In conjunction to this the rise of interest in the 18th century in physiognomy, are given as a basis of a historical context which 'normalizes' Messerschmidt's work. While Pötzl-Malikova sees the strength of the character-heads in the 'transgressive ambivalent zone, which leads one to a questioning of the constructs of the notion of madness; Wittkower sees Messerschmidt as having stood in two different worlds also. But he uses this as I say as a normalizing stratagem.

The two worlds that Messerschmidt stood at had several levels. Firstly the lower-middle class origins of the sculptor was contrasted by the upper class intelligentsia and academic milieu which he was involved with in Vienna. Wittkower suggests that although uneducated by the

principles of the enlightenment age, he was involved in theoretical and esoteric problems and the cross pollination between a social context of enlightenment reason and a context of believers in occult and supernatural, was therefore possible. This we cannot definitely know, but the preoccupation with and connection between physiognomies, proportion and spiritualism was not universal for that period.

Proportion had been the backbone of art theory since Alberti. Artists, philosophers and theologians regarded proportion as the mysterious order governing the universe. Indeed there may be a grain of truth in the endowment of proportion, geometry and the golden rule with spiritual dimensions. But the Age of Reason's after-ego, Wittkower suggests, was an age filled with occult, black magic, spiritualism, demonology and that it was not confined to the uneducated and their old wives tales. This is the suggestion, that the report of Nicolai is attesting more to a follower of the occult than to a case of schizophrenia. For instance, if the highest authorities supported the belief in the diabolical and demonic forces, borne out by the rhetoric of the Inquisition, why not a simple sculptor? Wittkower notes that the last two witches tried and condemned by presumably 'sane' judges were beheaded in 1775 and 1782. The suggestion that Messerschmidt could have been a member of a secret society follows from this reasoning. One cannot be certain that the demons and spirits of proportion were not delusions but were central to the

beliefs of some secret society. Wittkower mentions the Rosicrucians as the source of the "insane hypothesis" that Messerschmidt relayed to Nicolai. This may account for the 'underside of the Age of Reason; (as Wittkower phrases it), populated with obscure characters such as the Rosicrucians. The sect which sprang up in the low countries and Germany was founded in 1413 and might be termed "the esoteric wing of Christianity"¹⁵ and can be traced as bridging the worlds of medieval and that of the Age of Reason. The 'brotherhood' as it was called, was much involved in the linking of science and spiritualism, alchemy playing an important part. One of the 18th century rules of the Order stipulated the refrain from all sensual pleasures. Numerous other sects supported such abstinence (not only the mother Church), as a pre-requisite for attaining insight and cognition. This again leads to speculation of the possibility of membership of a secret occult organisation or a combination of delusional mental state, with a preoccupation with matters esoteric. Wittkower recognises the Egyptian figure which hung near the window from Nicolais report. That of a drawing of Hermes Trismegistos, the venerable graced Egyptian god of esoteric knowledge whom renaissance philosophers rediscovered and who haunted innumerable treatises ever since. In summing up Wittkower states,

"Even the most extravagant beliefs can hardly be quoted as proof of insanity of an individual if they have been shared by thousands of people for hundreds of years".

While Wittkower opened up the issues and possibilities of a historical context for the character heads, his motivation for such seems at best an attempt to normalise and indeed defuse the power of Messerschmidts work.

The route of placing Messerschmidt historically can be advanced more properly, not so much by attempts at normalization, but rather by exploring the "transgressive ambivalent zone" that the sculptures may occupy. What the Wittkower's show is the inherent difficulty of drawing a line between 'sane' and 'insane' which usefully tempers Kris analysis, but art-historically there is a rich vein to be tapped which avoids the "controlling strategies of final explication".¹⁶

So it is to history that I shall turn for the final phrase of this paper. The neglect of the relationship between Messerschmidt's character heads and the theories and practices of physiognomy shall be redressed. This will be through an examination of some aspects of notions and representations of the 'other' or 'madness' in history. For one cannot ignore the fascinating postulation of Jill Lloyd that "makes it hard to believe that Messerschmidts character-heads do not engage on some level with 18th century representations of madness". The basis of addressing the question seriously is on the recognition that 18th century conceptions of madness, as much as our own understandings of mental illness, have been shaped by a

complex cultural, political, economic and epistemological history.

The Other

"We conceive ourselves, our personalities and our own ego's as being steady and firm. The fact that we could disintegrate mentally by way of natural processes - as the schizophrenic does - is a monstrous, uncanny concept."¹⁷

These words of Manfred Blueeler outline the fear of collapse, the sense of dissolution which contaminates the Western image of all diseases including madness or schizophrenia. Sander L Gilman describes this fear as one which does not remain internalized but rather,

"We project this fear onto the world in order to localize it and indeed to domesticate it. For once we locate it the fear of our own dissolution is removed. Then it is not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but rather the Other. And it is an-Other who has already shown his or her vulnerability by having collapsed".¹⁸

Michel Foucault sees the characteristic of such formulations as the forced silence of madness and sees that modern psychiatry formed the way it did because of the silencing by reason of madness through the ages. He claims to write not the history of the language of reason on madness, but rather to write the archaeology of the silence. Three major narratives intertwine within Foucault's text; "Madness and Civilisation". They concern the political

economy of madness, the representation of madness in art and literature and the relation between madness and science.

For Foucault the leper was 'the Other' of the medieval world, a prime source of contamination which was to be treated with respectful fear. The lazar houses which the lepers filled were for the extensive exclusion of leprosy from ordinary society. Being peculiarly held in places of exile but yet at the margin, sufficiently close to be a reminder of the punishment of God and as such, a lesson to all.

With the decline of the disease by the 16th century a new leper is born who takes the place of the first. Foucault pointed to the economic and social changes that took place in Europe from the middle of the 16th century. A re-organisation and re-orientation of the financial infrastructure of exclusion: The transition from a feudal to a mercantile society, the rising bourgeoisie and it's pervasive bureaucracy made the new isolated what Roy Boyne termed the "pariahs of non-productivity": the poor, the criminal, the homeless and the mad.

Alongside the change in social structure is a change in general attitudes and values of European culture. The non-productive, the armies of beggars and vagabonds came to be seen by the 17th century as a political problem: an affront to the newly developed ethic of work. Economic depression the emergence of new ethics, the administrative expansion of

the state, all these factors combined to usher in what Foucault calls 'The Age of Confinement'. In France this is symbolised by the foundation of its bastion of confinement, the General Hospital in 1656 in Paris.

During the 150 year history of the General Hospital, poverty was gradually freed from absolute moral condemnation. Industrial growth over this period meant that a labouring class became an economic necessity for national wealth. In a mercantilist economy the pauper had no place being neither producer nor consumer. With the development of industry, confinement of the poor became outmoded and an economically irrational charity. The secret of wealth would be the exploitation of the poor not their imprisonment.

Moving on to the 18th century "increasingly madness becomes the spectre of the interneers, the very image of their humiliation, of their reason vanquished and unreason reduced to silence". As a result, by the middle of the century Foucaults describes the appearance of a 'Great Fear'. People were afraid of a mysterious disease that originated, it was said, from the houses of confinement. At the very moment the face of madness and unreason was believed to be profoundly hidden, the practices of confinement turn back on them with a vengeance. Foucault writes:

"But now the estate of confinement acquired its own powers: it became the birthplace of evil by itself, instituting another reign of terror".

Anxiety and fear haunted the late 18th century psyche, the fear of contamination and fear of ones own confinement. Confinement had created images of unpredictable violence and disruptive frenzy. The typical mad person was no longer a fool but a raving lunatic.

Such deliberation may seem to diverge from the principle focus of our attention i.e. the work of Messerschmidt, however what such a history in economic and social terms does, is to preface the consciousness of madness which existed up to the artists time. The Age of Confinement would come to an end as a political economic and social failure, but the images of madness would leave its legacy in the fear and loathing of madness allied to the next response to it at the turn of the 19th century i.e. the interventions of the medical profession to cope with a 'disease' and their introduction of a reform movement for the mad.

But the late 18th century would be dominated still by the asylum. While there were classifications of madness and while there were medical conceptions of bodily disorder producing aberrations of the mind, there was not a conception of mental illness at the time. Messerschmidts time is one where various treatments that were practised derived from in part a dimly perceived inheritance from ancient times and in part from the location of newly emerging medical groupings, within the apparatus of power.

Notions of body and soul were intertwined in general conceptions of the humans condition.

This inheritance is from the notion of humours of Hippocrates. Foucault notes that in the classical period the therapeutics of madness did not function in hospital, whose chief concern was to sever or "correct". And yet in the non-hospital domain, long cures for madness were elaborated, the aim was not so much to care for the soul as to cure the entire individual. - "his nervous fibre as well as the course of his imagination".

Gilman notes the "mad can be identified by the myths of their external appearance, as in melancholy, their signs of illness or their setting (the house of confinement)

Representations of Madness

While the history of "the Other" and "madness" from the economic and social context may slightly diverge from the subject, an examination of representations of Madness would be difficult without it. Foucault portrays an interesting dichotomy of the Western experience of madness viz a viz art and literature. This is based on "a great line of cleavage". On the one hand madness is inexplicable and holds out the threats of dark and unknown regions. On the other hand madness is explicable ; it is foolishness and illusion, a condition of terror with some prior cause. The

line is between "the Other" and "the Same". In Foucault's view the depiction of madness by renaissance painters was concerned with the fantastic and terrible territory of "the Other", while the writers of this period were already treating madness as a matter of this world significance.

"On one side Bosch, Brueghel, Therry Bouts Durer and the prevailing silence of the image. It is in this space of pure vision that madness will display its powers ... in that space madness possesses a primitive force of revelation ... On the other side with Brant, with Erasmus and with the whole humanist tradition, madness is set within the universe of discourse. There it is defined and disarmed (Foucault)".

For Foucault, this opposition is resolved at the end of the Renaissance, discursive domestication had eclipsed the fantasies of the Figural. From that point forward only the occasional murmurings of the Marquis de Sade, or the visionary explorations of Goya would hint that the opposition had not readily been destroyed, "but that it had been overlaid and hidden by a compact between science and morality" (Roy Boyne)

While Boyne's analysis of Foucault points out that the paintings of Bosch - "the Cure of Madness"; "the Ship of Fools" and "the Temptation of St. Anthony" and Breughal "the Triumph of Death" and "Dulle Grut" and "Horseman of the Apocalypse" by Durer ; may not be all Foucault says. "they do not point to what madness might be in its entirely separate realm, but rather to what madness can do with in this world of ours" (Boyne P. 16-17).

This does not diffuse the area of interest for us, given to us by Foucault, that of post-Renaissance world of representation ; that which is hidden by a compact between science and morality. As the previous chapter has shown us that as the order of the world changes so too does the world truth about madness. The intimate connection between madness and will ; between madness and society, slipped from recognition. In post-Renaissance times madness comes to be defined purely as error and then irresponsibility.

Foucault's great symbol of Renaissance madness - "the Ship of Fools" (Narrenschiff) full of lost souls on a journey into the unknown, maybe in search of their sanity, is replaced by the place of correction and confinement, be it the hospital or prison, the madhouse.

It is Goya and de Sade who testified that the claims of a neutralising science might be false and Foucault sees Goya on signifying a renewed interest in the reason and unreason in all humanity. Caprichos No. 43 is the image of the artist himself asleep across a desk, upon which his pen and papers are strewn ; bats and owls converge on the sleeping figure from out of darkness and the inscription on the side of the desk "the sleep of reason brings forth monsters". Foucault reads this as the sleep of unreason at an end. The silence cannot go on. Similarly with de Sade, all the facets of desire and fear at the end of the 18th century are released and viewed as part of man given by nature.

Sadism is not a name finally given to a practice as old as Eros ; it is a massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the end of the 18th century. ... unreason transformed in the delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite. Sadism appears at the very moment that unreason confined for over a century and reduced to silence, reappears ²⁷.

So while WittKower is right in saying that Messerschmidt stood between two worlds, it is not unfair to suggest that he stood within the crossroads of two times. Not a visionary artist of Goya's calibre, nor the release of images by de Sade of fear and desire. But rather Messerschmidt cuts a figure of an artist before such figures of the early 19th century ; located at a time when the madhouse was still the classical fortress where unreason and madness resided. Here morality surrounds the conception of madness evidenced by the epitomising etchings of Hogarth, in Rakewells Progress. (fig. 34)

Hogarth's character in the series of etchings, the young Rakewell, inherited his money rather than earned it. the curse of unearned money and the lack of moral fibre that ensued caused the money to be wasted, then the man demised and was led to the madhouse. He is presented in exactly the same manner as the statue of raving madness that adorns the front entrance to Bedlam. Rakewell is surrounded by the entire spectrum of madness, from the melancholic lover on the steps to the religious zealot in his cell. What Hogarth does with the Rakes Progress and his other morality based

works is to combine the follies of men, with his representations of characters and caricatures. The faces of madness become identifying marks. The identification of archetype by their inherent qualities as well as their external appearance (clothing, setting etc), was something that links to the rise of a science which was based on a tradition as old as Aristotle.

Johann Lavater introduced a new way of looking and judging the insane which extended into a vast ten volumes with the involvement of two famous personages of the time, Chodowiecki and Goethe. They cover all branches of the doctrines of physiognomy from its ancient traditions, i.e. the nature of the passion, expression of various ages, the ideal physiognomy, the physiognomy of beauty, illness, temperament and madness. All the inherent qualities of a face; shape of nose, colour of eyes, the structure of the head and frame, were significant in determining the character and thus a predisposition to insanity, which Lavater believed to be merely a reflection of character. Lavater's writings brought what had existed since the Renaissance but it was only in the 1770's that this mode of description and illustration captured the popular fancy of all Europe. The portraits of cretins are indicated by "sloping foreheads", his melancholia is characterised by the (Saturnine) "unequal forehead depressions of the temples and sunken eyes". Comparing Hogarth's bedlam and Lavater's writings with Chodowiecki's illustrations, a picture of the

"monist relationship between body and mind as a key to the personality"²⁸ emerges.

Messerschmidts character-heads have been linked with this tradition, yet mistakenly in my view for a direct correlation to be made. What they do relate to is the explanations of Kris and his connection of physical and spiritual elements. The cure Messerschmidt devised for the persecution of demons and "spirits of proportion" is one where the soul purges itself through the body and face. Where the historical co-relation of Lavaters theories and Messerschmidt does form its strongest link is little to do with either men but in the context in which Messerschmidt's work was shown after his death.

In 1793 the character heads transversed another boundary when the first exhibition showed his work, not in the Vienna Academy, but in the Vienna Bürgerspital (the Citizens hospital). It was there that they were given their individual titles and the generic title of character-heads. Also the busts were put on show at Prater, the popular amusement ground of Vienna at the time, illustrating as their posthumous titles suggested the expression of passions. Indeed, Kris who fails to acknowledge the facts pertaining to the titling of the sculpture, suggests that the character-heads may have related to the work of the English anatomist Parsons from the middle of the 18th century. He sought to represent the changing relationships of the facial muscles in the performance of different

functions, for example yawning. However, as James Lingwood notes, "Agreement about the incongruity of these titles is perhaps the only unifying thread in the rich historiography of Messerschmidt's studies".

Returning to Messerschmidt's method in his madness. The cure of persecuting demons by pulling faces in a mirror in conjunction with pinching himself under the ribs are related to the general conceptions of the non difference between body and mind - all being based on the flow of humours, be they black bile or phlegm, and this having direct influence on the character of the personality and indeed their inherent physical characteristics as well ; evidenced by the 18th century resurgence of physiognomy.

Another aspect of representations of madness that is suggested by Messerschmidt's character heads is the sense of spectacle and theatre which Jill Lloyd sees in the bust, relates to Foucault's description of a "cure by theatrical representation". This involves confronting the insane with a mirror of his own meanings. Rather than awakening the "dream of waking persons" that delirium is (which was practised with very repressive and often violent results) instead cures by theatrical representation, this involves confronting delirium with in the space of the imagination. Through illusion, a lesson would be passed onto the madman. Foucault relays the case of a melancholic who believed himself damned by the enormity of the sins he had committed. In the impossibility of convincing him by reasonable

argument that he could be saved, his physicians accepted his delirium and caused an "angel" dressed in white, with a sword in hand, to appear to him, and after severe exhortation, this delusive vision declared that his sin had been remitted.

Lloyd seems to suggest that the inversion of enlightenment logic in the explanations of Messerschmidt to Nicolai is extended to the inversion of the madman to doctor. Messerschmidt holds up the mirror of the cure to the 18th century rationalist. The cure is developed from within the realm of unreason and delusion. Messerschmidt claims to be master over the spirits that haunt him.

CONCLUSION

To declare someone mad or to identify a substantive instance of madness, is to categorise. It is not a pure identification, there is a judgement involved. This is the implied judgement that whosoever declares some one made is sane themselves.

European man, since the beginning of the middle ages, has had a relation to something he calls indiscriminately "Madness", "Dementia", "Insanity". Art and its own kinds of madness have been longtime bedfellows. From Plato's poetic madness to Hollywood's "the Agony and the Ecstasy". Through the powerful cultural mythology (built on the foundations of the conception of art and divine inspiration), the popular belief of the stereotypical artist type has stayed with us. In contemporary cultural debate, the reactionary and often sexist nature of the "genius artist and madman" myth has been exposed and discussed. It was not my prime motivation to entangle myself in such issues. But what has become clear is that as far as the character heads of Messerschmidt are concerned, they often deflect analysis and strategies of explanation back at the observer, often revealing his or her natural stand-point more than any essence of the sculpture. They seem to slip away from underneath the intellectual controversies. Their ambivalence, humour, theatre remains. I knew nothing of the context and the character heads when I started the research for this essay. All theories pertaining to Messerschmidt contradicted nothing nor proved anything. As illustrations of Mesmer's theories of animal

magnetism or Lavater's physiognomy, they all seemed to enrich the tapestry of possibilities, but were distant enough for me to maintain faith in the feeling for the character heads that I had when first I clapped eyes on photographs of them. But Kris' incisive and confident analysis took the sculpture from the realm of possibility and not knowing, into that of the knowable. Fascinating as the psychoanalysis was, after the initial satisfaction of identifying and knowing something, left me empty with regard to the character heads as art. Foucault wrote : "in our era, the experience of madness (now mental illness) remains silent in the composure of a knowledge which knowing too much about madness forgets it". It was not the complete process of Kris' psychoanalysis that lead to this forgetful state, of the wonder of Messerschmidt, but rather, that prevalent action of psychiatry : diagnosis. Identification of a presumed essence by a label. This label being "schizophrenic psychotic." Once tarred by the brush of a label which has the power of plausibility, it sticks. Kris can be believed and accepted as the disarming power of a scientific fact.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and art is complex. The opening of the unconscious processes that might be at work in any artistic production is something which cannot be ignored and can be fruitful, as it was for the surrealists earlier this century. But once the psychoanalyst reaches his apparent goal, all is lost. One cannot help but feel the spoiling power of diagnosis, its

only a symptom, a symptom of a disease - schizophrenia. Artist envy? Who knows. Once "the Other" is evoked, madness pointed out, the discourse closes for me. By the simple act of labelling, (which is a natural act) the psychiatrist evokes all that madness has meant through the ages. Separation - Division - Isolation. Something I do not want art to be and the work of Messerschmidt was not, till it was taken from the realm of the bizarre to that of psychotic.

But they still make me laugh. Do I laugh, ridiculing the productions of madness or as a defensive grimace against that which seems to be laughing and grimacing with glee at all those who seriously and piously "explained" the character heads since the 1770's?

- 11 R & M Wittkower, **Born under Saturn**
- 12 Kris
- 13 One has to take Kris at his word with regards to the other
commissioned portrait, no illustration of it could be found by me.
- 14 Doener Klaus "**Madness and the Bourgeoisie**"
- 15 Clement A. Wartheim Aymes. The Political Language of Bosch -
(Bosch was a member of the Rosicrucian Order)
- 16 Jill Lloyd (see bibliography)
- 17 Bleuler, Manfred, "What is Schizophrenia?"
- 18 Gilman, Sander L. "Disease and Representations"
- 27 Foucault : M & C p. 210
- 28 Gilman, Sander L. "Disease and Representation"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Barlthes, Roland : Mythologies (1973; Paladin)
- Balthrusaitis, Jorges : Aberrations (1989;
Masachussetts Institute of
Technology
- Bleuler, Manfred: What is Schizophrenia? (1984)
- Boyne, Roy: Foucault and Derrida, The
other side of Reason (1990
Unwin Hyman)
- Cousins, Mark and Michael Foucault
Arthur Hussain: (1984 MacMillan)
- Doenaer, A.: Madness and the Bourgeoisie
(1981 Oxford)
- Dreyfus, Herbert L : Michael Foucault : Beyond
& Rainbow, Paul Structuralism and Hermanetics.
(1982; Harvester Press,
London)

- Derrida, Jacques : Writing and Difference (1978
Routledge, Chapter 2 : Cognito
and the History of Madness)
- Foucault Michel : Madness and Civilisation
(1967; Travistock) First
published in French as
Histoire de la Folie 1961)
- Foucault Michel : The Order of Things (1972,
Travistock)
- Freud Sigmund : Art and Literature (1985,
Penguin)
- Gilman, Sander L. Disease and Representation
(1988; Cornell University
Press)
- Kris, Ernst : Psychoanalytic Explorations in
Art (Int. Universities Press
1952. Translation from German
1932)
- Lement, Charles C. : Michel Foucault : Social
and Garth Gillian : Theory and Transgression
(1982; Columbia University
Press)

- Milner, Marion : The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men (Travistock; 1987)
- Wittkower, R & M : Born under Saturn (1963; London)
-

Articles

- Kuspit, Donald : Artist Envy : (Artforum; April '87)
- Kristeva, Julia : An Interview by Catherine Franklin (Flash Art; Feb/March '86)
- Lloyd, Jill : Franz Xaver Messerschmidt Character Heads (1988 Catalogue of ICA Exhibition of Messerschmidt sculpture)
- Nicolai Fredrich : Recollection of a meeting with Messerschmidt (1988 Catalogue, ICA exhibition; first published Berling 1785)